

## Book review

# *Peace and conflict in Africa*

**Francis, David J. (ed.) 2008**

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Many interpretations of peace and conflict in Africa are too simplistic. The book under review, therefore, seeks to deviate from those interpretations and provide a more detailed perspective. A collection of essays edited by David J. Francis, the book is touted as an introduction text to key themes with regard to peace and conflict in Africa. The book aims, firstly, to introduce the reader to the concepts, debates and issues in peace and conflict in Africa, and, secondly, to stress the importance of indigenous African approaches to peacebuilding. Thus, the book is divided into two parts. The first part has seven chapters and deals mostly with concepts and the discourse of peace and conflict in Africa. Part two has five chapters and deals with issues in peace and conflict.

The first chapter is an introduction to the context of peace and conflict. The author presents an overview of the western media's representation of Africa, reviews selected literature on conflicts, and appreciates Africa's potential and

mineral resource endowment. Besides lamenting that conflicts have undermined that potential, he explores the political and economic conditions in which conflicts arise. He also defines terms such as patron-clientelism, patrimonialism and neo-patrimonialism, and ends with an outline of the book and explanations for the choice of the articles.

Chapter two, by Tim Murithi, focuses on traditional African approaches to peace and conflict. Noting that the African concept of peace is much broader and deeper than the liberal notions, the author contextualises these approaches within the broad peace and conflict issues. He analyses four indigenous approaches: the *jir* mediation of the Tiv people of Nigeria, the *shir* process in Somaliland, the *Mato Oput* of the Acholi of northern Uganda and the *ubuntu* concept of South Africa. He ends the chapter with an analysis of the strengths of these processes.

The third chapter, by Isaac Albert, addresses conceptions of peace. Albert notes that, firstly, the current emphasis by academics and policy analysts has been on what outsiders are doing or can do and not what the people can do for themselves. Secondly, he notes that the formal dispute and conflict resolution institutions in Africa – including the judiciaries – lack credibility. He also analyses what appears to be a broad global conceptualisation of peace and lays a philosophical framework of peace in Africa. Albert cites several examples from different parts of Africa to support his framework, including *Gacaca* in Rwanda, *Mato Oput* in northern Uganda and *Kgotla* in Botswana. He ends with a call for integration of African conceptions to the global ones.

Chapter four and chapter five are closely related. João Porto focuses on mainstreaming of conflict analysis in Africa in chapter four, and Kenneth Omeje contributes chapter five where he focuses on understanding conflict resolution in Africa. Porto summarises the conflict analysis theory and its contribution to conflict resolution. He then explores the practice of conflict analysis mainstreaming, citing examples from across the continent. He concludes with a review of the dilemmas and challenges of conflict analysis. Omeje, in contrast, reviews theoretical discussions of conflict resolution from the perspectives of realists, behaviourists and critical theorists and their implications for conflict resolution. One point that stands out is the distinction between conflict

resolution and conflict transformation. He then looks at various analyses of causes of conflicts in Africa as presented from the viewpoints of primordialism, instrumentalism, and political ecology and conflict goods theories, and then critiques each. The chapter ends with an analysis of various conflict resolution approaches such as military victories, elite co-optation, third party mediation, and traditional African approaches.

The sixth chapter, by Nana Poku, analyses the context of security. The author starts by tracing the evolution of the nation-state in Europe. She then contrasts that with the African state that was imposed by colonial powers. She identifies several challenges that arise from that imposition including cultural-linguistic links across borders and internal ethnic composition. The author notes that only Nigeria, Ethiopia, South Africa and the DRC have more than 30 million people. She then highlights problems such as lack of common 'constitutive stories', ethnic and social class divides, and parallelism between statism and nationalism – which have undermined the social contract and rendered the state very weak, thus leading to conflicts. The current challenges include bad governance, low overseas development assistance, the debt burden and the HIV/AIDS pandemic. In short, the context of security is deeply linked to state consolidation. Whilst state weakness has bred conflicts, the conflicts have led to underdevelopment and social injustices which generate further conflicts. She suggests that Africa needs to change its focus from international interventions to a people-centred approach.

Tony Karbo contributes chapter seven in which he analyses peacebuilding. He starts by unpacking the concept of peacebuilding and approaches in this regard. These include the conflict transformation approach, as espoused by John Paul Lederach, and structural approaches. The author delves into the role of non-governmental organisations. Among the challenges to peacebuilding that he lists are: protracted or intractable conflicts, the involvement of external players who do not seek sustainable solutions, the countries' involvement with external lenders such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, and the nature and persistence of conflicts and employment of top-bottom approaches to peacebuilding. The author ends with a review of the prospects for

peacebuilding, including the African Union (AU) reforms, the strengthening of regional institutions and the role of traditional African approaches.

Chapter eight is the first chapter in Part two. Written by Jannie Malan, the chapter explores transitional justice issues. Malan starts by distinguishing retributive and restorative justice, and then analyses transitional justice issues in post-genocide Rwanda and post-apartheid South Africa. He explores the *Gacaca* traditional system as well as South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). He identifies four notions of truth that emerged from the TRC hearing sessions: factual or forensic truth, personal or narrative truth, social or dialogue truth and healing and restorative truth. He also cites the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation as one of the TRC outcomes. Among the key lessons from post-1994 Rwanda and South Africa are: the need to address transition as a comprehensive process, the need to consider practical mechanisms of implementing transitional justice, and the promotion of transformative transitional justice.

The next chapter, by Belachew Gebrewold, deals with issues of democracy and democratisation in Africa. After reviewing the conceptualisations and practicalities of democratisation, the author analyses 'quality of governance as a benchmark for the quality of democracy' in which he lists several points, among them political stability and absence of violence, voice and accountability, government effectiveness, role of law and control of corruption (p. 154). He then discusses challenges facing democratisation. These include ethnicity, corruption, and an anti-democratic international system. He ends with a review of many countries and depicts the successes and failures of the African democratisation experiment.

Chapter ten, by Mohamed Salih, explores the links between poverty, human security and the liberal peace discourse. Noting that human security is about protecting and empowering citizens to obtain vital freedoms from several threats, including fear and hunger, the author argues that poverty hampers the attainment of human security. He argues that liberal peace is not a sufficient condition for attainment of human security, and reviews the linkage between the peaceful management of conflicts and human security. He also explores in

some detail several human security indicators, and policy responses such as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD). Besides linking liberal peace with the poverty-human security debate, he observes that indicators of liberal peace do not in themselves provide human security. He also notes the tensions that exist between neo-liberal values and the socio-economic conditions in which they thrive, and ends with a view that liberal peace has not improved human security in Africa.

Jim Whitman contributes the last chapter that situates concerns about peace and conflict in Africa within the globalisation paradigm. The author reviews key generalisations such as, 'Africa the country', and that globalisation can be reduced 'to observable effects, abstracting what is most significant about it politically, socially and environmentally; and sidelining considerations of power, agency and causation' (p. 185). He notes that analysing Africa within the globalisation concern ignores national differences and competing, often contradictory, national choices. The author then delves into AU's mechanisms of peace and security, and the challenges facing African states in a globalising world. Such challenges include the 'cheap selling' of Africa's precious commodities, poor governance, corruption and low human capital development. He does not forget to mention China's 'considerable investments on the continent' and the 'good deal of ambivalence, since Africans are keenly aware that there is nothing altruistic in China's intentions' (p. 192). He ends with a hope that 'a new generation of African leaders, unburdened by misplaced loyalties' will emerge to navigate Africa to prosperity.

*Peace and conflict in Africa* has several strengths. The book adds to the growing literature about peace and conflict in Africa; it documents important traditional African responses to conflicts from a peace and conflict studies dimension; and it offers a different conceptualisation of peace and conflict. Also, the book has several weaknesses. Firstly, some of the articles need to be reviewed. For example, the number of countries with a population of more than 30 million people is certainly more than four - Kenya (36 million), Tanzania (40 million), and Sudan (40 million) are far beyond that mark. Secondly, key questions remained unanswered. For instance, why has *shir* succeeded in Somaliland and not the rest of the country, yet the Somali culture is the same? How can a single

cultural group's traditional approach resolve a conflict over the control of a modern multi-cultural nation-state? Why have there been conflicts in culturally homogeneous countries such as Rwanda, Burundi and Somalia, yet Tanzania with more than 120 ethnic groups has been very stable? Lastly, *Peace and conflict in Africa* can indeed serve as an introduction to key themes in peace and conflict in Africa, but can obviously not stand on its own as a foundation text in this field.